

Purdue University
Purdue e-Pubs

Proceedings of the IATUL Conferences

2018 IATUL Proceedings

How can the university library at OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University become an important arena for culture, art and debate?

Tone Berg Knudsen
Oslo Metropolitan University (Norway)

Hege Skahjem
Oslo Metropolitan University (Norway)

Tone Berg Knudsen and Hege Skahjem, "How can the university library at OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University become an important arena for culture, art and debate?." *Proceedings of the IATUL Conferences*. Paper 5.
<https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/iatul/2018/usercentered/5>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries.
Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

HOW CAN THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY AT OSLOMET – OSLO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY BECOME AN IMPORTANT ARENA FOR CULTURE, ART AND DEBATE?

TONE BERG KNUDSEN & HEGE SKAHJEM

OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University

Norway

E-mail: Tone-berg.knudsen@oslomet.no, Hege.Skahjem@oslomet.no

This article is based on a collaborative project between Tone Berg Knudsen, Hege Skahjem and Tone Hoemsnes. Tone Hoemsnes has contributed to ideas in the project, but has not participated in the writing process itself.

Abstract

OsloMet acquired university status in 2018, and as a result, the Learning Centre and Library has become a University Library.

An important social mission for the University Library is that it “shall contribute to the dissemination of results from Research and Development” (University and Higher Education Act §1-3). This also includes R&D in the creative and performing arts.

OsloMet shall further “stimulate students and staff to participate in public debates” and “develop activities at an institutional level in order to strengthen engagement, unity and common identity among students and staff” (Strategy 2024). How can the University Library help achieve these goals?

The lunch event “Lunsjpåfyll” has since 2012 been an important arrangement in our user-centered Library. Significant figures from research and professional life are invited to speak about topics of interest in the library once a month.

In addition, we have our own exhibition area situated at one of our libraries, available for students, staff and others who may want to present creative work or performances related to their professional activities at our institution. This autumn, students from the Department of Art, Design and Drama have presented examination pieces in the library.

Events, exhibitions and debates contribute to student and staff engagement, within – and across – professional fields and faculties. As members of the event committee for “Lunsjpåfyll” and “Exhibitions”, we wish to develop these two traditions by strengthening our cooperation within the organization. In this presentation, we will talk about our vision of the new concept, and share some of our experiences and challenges.

Our goal is to make the University Library an inspiring place to be.

Keywords: Academic libraries; Public mission; Social mission; Debate; Events; Exhibitions

Introduction

OsloMet - Oslo Metropolitan University, is the third largest university in Norway, with 20 322 students registered in 2017. [Statistisk sentralbyrå/Statistics Norway [SSB], 2018]. From January 12th 2018, the institution Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HiOA) was granted a university status. OsloMet has a professionally oriented profile and is organized into four faculties and 21 departments, and also has two centres of research and development [HiOA, November 17].

The University Library - former Learning Centre and Library - has four libraries. Three of them are located at campus Pilestredet in Oslo, and one is located at Campus Kjeller in Akershus. The University Library also has services like Learning support, AV Services, Diversity in Pedagogical Practices, English for Academic Purposes and LATINA/lab [Learning Centre and Library, n.d.]

An important social or public mission for the University Library is that it “shall contribute to the dissemination of results from Research and Development” [University and Higher Education Act §1-3]. This also includes R&D in the creative and performing arts.

We have two traditions for public events at OsloMet University Library, which is Library Lunch Events (Lunsjpåfyll), and Exhibitions.

Until now these two types of events have been organized and promoted as separately. We think, however, that these two traditions might be able to energize each other, and we wish to think about how we might cooperate more closely to strengthen the library as an arena for public discussion and debate. Fortunately, we already have many types of events: Discussions, lectures, exhibitions, research communication and book events.

Our paper is basically divided into four parts:

1. The public mission at the academic libraries in Norway is, to an extent, justified and founded in University law and strategic documents. But the concept of the public mission, combined with arenas for public events, still needs to be interpreted and developed by the academic institutions. This is our main focus.
2. In the following, we will give some practical examples from our Library Lunch Events and Exhibitions. These events represent our way of trying to interpret and implement the public mission of academic libraries.
3. Then we will further demonstrate some challenges we have.
4. Finally, we will present a conclusion, where we will suggest some solutions to these challenges.

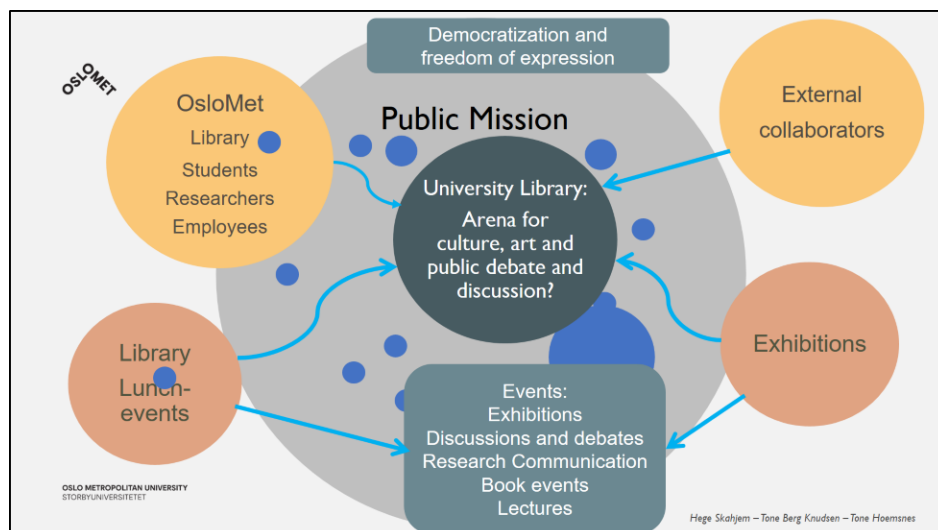


Figure 1: What happens when we merge the two traditions, Library Lunch Events and Exhibitions?

The public mission of academic and public libraries and legislation

Unlike the public libraries, the academic libraries in Norway do not have a clearly defined or statutory public mission, combined with arenas for arrangements. Public Libraries and Academic Libraries both have a long-time tradition for facilitating different activities and dialogue through public events. In the digital age, we have to attract users to the physical library, and be relevant and visible. The main difference, however, is the owners and users. The public libraries are owned by municipalities, and the users are the public. The academic libraries are owned by the institution, and the users are mainly students and staff. As a consequence, laws and legislation that govern the different kind of libraries are different. We have the “Act relating to universities and university Colleges” by the Ministry of Education and Research (2005), and the “Act relating to public libraries” (1985) by the Ministry of Culture. The actual law texts are cited below:

The “Act relating to universities and university colleges” will work to support the aim of the law by:

- d) “helping to disseminate the results of research and of academic and artistic development work”.
- f) “making provisions for participation in the public debate by the institution’s staff and students”. [Universitets- og høyskoleloven, 2005, §1-3].

The “Act relating to public libraries” confirms that :

“Public libraries are to be an independent meeting place and arena for public discussions and debates” [Folkebibliotekloven, 1985, §1].

As we see in these Norwegian law texts, the public library has a clear mission for being a meeting place and arena for public debate and discussions. Academic libraries, on the other hand, do not have such a clear mission. This means that academic libraries have to translate the legislation into their institutional strategies. Based on these texts - how is the public mission and arenas currently reflected in our strategies? According to Anderson, Fagerlid, Larsen & Straume, the role of the academic libraries are:

The libraries are the building blocks of the modern, democratic nation-states. The academic libraries have a particular responsibility for managing the historic and scientific legacy, and further to make this legacy available for researchers and lay people. By providing access to knowledge and information, the library is facilitating the achievement of an open and public conversation between equal citizens. In short, they represent a central part of the public infrastructure [Anderson, Fagerlid, Larsen & Straume, 2017, p.12].

The public mission of OsloMet University Library – institutional strategies

The OsloMet Strategy does not explicitly mention the university library, yet there are many elements of the strategy in which the university library can help the institution achieve its strategic goals. OsloMet will:

Main Goal 1:

“...encourage students and staff to participate in the public debate”.

“Strengthen our students’ knowledge about the role of research and train students in critical thinking”

Main Goal 4:

“Develop activities on an institutional level to enhance engagement, unity and common identity among students and staff” [Strategy 2024].

Based on the strategy, how can we make a new arena where we can explore the framework of our public mission? How can we develop the University Library as an arena that facilitates and promotes democratic participation at our institution? How can a cooperation between Library Lunch Events and exhibitions create a new arena for culture, art and debate? We think that a citation from the Director of The National Library of Norway, Aslak Sira Myhre, illustrates our task:

When we talk about knowledge, I want to add this: Presentations and arrangements also represent knowledge. I have little faith in a traditional and waterproof distinction between *Bildung** (*in UiO, 2013) and entertainment. Knowledge, *Bildung* and public education are more and more about dissemination [Letnes & Myhre, 2015, p. 28].

We see the importance of bringing these two kinds of events - Library Lunch Events and Exhibitions - together, rather than separate.

Marketing the events

The marketing plan for both our Library Lunch Events and our Exhibitions has so far been using Facebook accounts and the homepages at the University Library and OsloMet. Twitter accounts is also used for the Library Lunch Events.

We send e-mails to relevant OsloMet faculties and institutes. Word-of-mouth to students and staff often happens. We use streaming and filming of Library Lunch Events by our own AV Services, and we also use posters and flyers at campus. We would also like to mention Khrono, the independent newspaper at OsloMet, that sometimes presents events and exhibitions.

Library Lunch Events – background, numbers and collaborators

The Director of Learning Centre and Library – now the University Library – Lars Egeland initiated these arrangements in 2012, based on our former strategy 2020: The aim was to create a physical meeting place in the library as a response to general and specific challenges, for example the hybrid library – how to make the physical library relevant in the digital age. We also wanted to make the library more visible within our organization. Also, in the former strategy, the institution was working towards a university status. The aim for the public mission in that strategy was to “...challenge and set an agenda for public debate through diverse arenas for discussion and general research communication» [Strategy 2020].

The number of the events from 2012 – 2018 were in total 63. There were 2776 participants, which included streaming for 226 persons. The types of events are mainly discussions, book events, and research communication. The events are mainly located in an area in the Library facilities at the

ground floor in Pilestredet 48 (P48). The programming committee's members are librarians from OsloMet's 4 libraries, in total eight members. Until 2018 we organized for all four library units, but now we are divided into four local groups. This new organization may give us the opportunity to a closer cooperation with Exhibitions located in the Library in P48.

The collaborators within the university have been librarians, the Department of HR, the Department of External Relations and Communications, the AV Services, the Student Parliament and the OsloMet Faculties. Outside the university, some of our collaborators have been the Norwegian Library Association (NLA), and even a documentary festival Human Rights, Human Wrongs.

Library Lunch Events – practical examples

We will present five examples of events, in the categories public discussion and debates, book events and research communication.

The event *“Can Violence be Legitimate as a Political Expression?”* happened in 2014. We had a debate with Associate Professor at Faculty of Education and International Studies Lars Gule; adviser Shouaib Sultan from the Norwegian Centre Against Racism and political activist and author Jan Kallevik. Gule - which has the academic disciplines philosophy and social sciences - is currently teaching on a 15 ECTS course at OsloMet named «Knowledge of extremism and radicalisation», at the Faculty of Education and International Studies. He is a media expert on extremism and radicalisation. This event started a good discussion with the audience, and even attracted external participants.

In the event *“Hate Speech”* in 2015 Professor at the Faculty of Education and International Studies Anne Birgitta Nilsen talked about her book «Hate Speech» from 2014. Nilsen's academic disciplines are applied linguistics and cultural studies. This book presentation started a discussion later in the semester, and was connected to an exhibition, which will be described more in detail under Exhibitions.

“Shameless” was a book event we had in 2017, with a focus on gender. We cooperated with our Department of Human Resources, which also is responsible for culture, welfare and diversity at OsloMet. Vibeke Horn (HR) was the moderator of this event. This was our third most visited event, with approximately 100 students and staff participating. The author Nancy Herz presented the book «Shameless». She is a member of «The Shameless girls», an activist movement which challenges injustice and shaming in their own social environments. The group has become a media phenomenon in Norway and has received several awards. This book was even mentioned in the Prime Minister's New Years' Eve Speech in 2017.

The book event *“MEMO”* was presented at our yearly library week in (2015). *“MEMO”* demonstrates a method for memorization, and the author Oddbjørn By is a contestant in international competitions of memorization. Over 120 students participated. Oddbjørn By is a media personality in Norway, through the public broadcaster NRK. This was our most visited event.

In spring 2018, a research communication event was held at campus Kjeller. Three PhD projects were presented. Attendees from OsloMet were Nina Aakernes, from the Department of Vocational Teacher Education, Vibeke Sjøvoll from the Department of Product Design, and Tone Åker, from the Department of Behavioural Science. These were the titles of the projects: Aakernes: *«Apprenticeship at the Digital Working Place – When the Apprentice is both a Novice and an Expert»*; Sjøvoll: *«Design Education Between Play and Skills – Risk, Freedom and Failure»*; Åker: *«Interrogation of vulnerable persons in assault and sexual abuse»*. The PhD candidates gave a positive feedback to the programming committee that it had been very useful for them personally to make a presentation of their work in a more popularized form.

Exhibitions at the Library

We will now present Exhibitions at the Library and provide some examples of different types of exhibitions that we have shown over the years.

There are statistics back to 2008, and the total number of exhibitions these ten years (2008 – 2018) is between 70 and 80.

The exhibitions are located in an open area at the 1st. floor in the library. Some larger exhibitions and installations have been put up and presented in the lobby of P48 at the ground floor.

There has been different types of exhibitions presented at the Library through these years.

We will now focus on projects that illustrates our vision for the University Library to be an arena for culture and art, public discussions and debates. In particular we will present some examples of cooperation between the Exhibitions and the Library Lunch Events.

At first we want to present some works made by faculty members and students at OsloMet.

Categories of exhibitions

- Art made by faculty members
- Student projects and exams
- External artists/exhibitions
- Traveling exhibitions
- International topics
- Exchange students
- Book exhibitions
- Other topics

Exhibitions at the Library - OsloMet employees

When it comes to exhibitions presented by OsloMet employees, the main focus has been on works by faculty members at the Department of Art, Design and Drama, and The Faculty of Education and International Studies.

A wide range of topics have been presented: R & D projects, visualizations of textbooks, fabrics and textiles (e.g. tissues and embroidery), installations, drawing/painting, photography, sculptures and more.

The focus of the faculty members' work is in line with the policy of encouraging dissemination of research to the public at OsloMet.

Exhibitions at the Library - Student projects

Recent years (2017-18) the focus has turned more towards the students. They are now given more space and the opportunity to show their work and projects in the Library.

What's new?

- The library has in particular become an arena for the students from the Department of Art, Design and Drama. They have participated by displaying, artwork, costumes and masks, and by giving performances.
- MA exam performances: MA students in Drama and Theater communication have got the opportunity to implement their exams in public space showing their exam performances for students, teachers and examiners.
- Exchange students also have got the opportunity to present their work in the library during their stay at OsloMet.

These activities have contributed to making the library an arena for exchanging different experiences.

Exhibitions at the Library - International focus

There has been a tradition for events giving focus at international and social matters at the University Library at OsloMet, as presented for you in the Library Lunch Events.

Now we will give you some examples from Exhibitions on those topics:

In May this year we showed «*Survivors*» - *A Photo exhibition that tells Stories of survivors of violent extremism in Africa*. This exhibition was presented in the lobby (ground floor) at P48 and was our recent exhibition this year.

The exhibition is a collaboration between UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) and the Swedish-Eritrean photographer Malin Fezehai. Curator for the exhibition in Norway is Vendula Hurnikova. Before presented in Oslo «*Survivors*» has been on tour in different countries: «Folketinget» - København, «Riksdagen» - Stockholm and in the National Museum in Helsinki, Finland. The exhibition is still traveling, now it is shown at Oslo Central Station, until 25th of June.

«*The Visible Invisible*» was a local exhibition made for the International Photography Exhibition/VI international arts education by UNESCO. (2017). This exhibition brought artists from different parts of the world together. Their works were sold in order to raise money for the SOS Children's Villages. Curator was Georgeta Negraru (Exchange teacher at OsloMet) in collaboration with artist Ingunn Brevold and The University Library, P48.

In 2015 we presented two exhibitions that focused on freedom of speech/hate speech and human evil as a phenomenon. Both exhibitions were connected to the anniversary of the Norwegian Constitution– 100 years (1914-2014).

The year 2015 was also the start for a closer cooperation between Library Lunch Events and Exhibitions.

Exhibitions at the Library – “*Hurray to the Freedom of Speech*” (2015)

The exhibition “*Hurray to the Freedom of Speech*” presents a selection of newspaper cartoonists/caricaturists. Some of them have challenged political power with their satirical drawings, and they have been persecuted in their home countries. Famous caricaturists such as the artists Arifur Rahman, Fadi Abou Hassan and Abdullahi Muhiaddin were represented at the exhibition.

The National Center for Drawing and Freedom of Speech invited newspaper cartoonists to critically review their role regarding freedom of speech in 2014. The result was presented at the exhibition “*Hurray to the Freedom of Speech*” in The House of the Newspaper Cartoonists (“Avistegnernes Hus”) in Drøbak. The exhibition was organized in collaboration with Cartoonist Rights Network International. Drøbak is a free city for persecuted people working in newspapers.

The exhibition was in January 2015 presented in Stavanger Culture House (Sølvberget). The opening there was the day after the terrorist attack in Charlie Hebdo's editorial offices in Paris. (7th of Jan.

2015). This exhibition received enormous attention in Stavanger, and within three weeks, there were 9000 visitors.

Censorship: After being shown in Stavanger, the exhibition was put up in our library. This was initiated by our director Lars Egeland. It was planned to be presented in our open area for exhibitions. For safety reasons, a security assessment was made because of the recent happenings in Paris, and the exhibition was moved to a smaller, lockable room in the library, with a guard. The decision caused reactions both on and off campus and started a debate in the media. The Library then created a **meta exhibition** presenting the comments on this. Focus was set on the following discussion and on the media coverage of the event.

The meta exhibition was put up in the open area meant for the real exhibition, and the visitors could participate by leaving comments on a wall, which also became a part of the meta exhibition.

Exhibitions at the Library - "*Cruelty Has a Human Heart*" (2015)

The exhibition "*Cruelty Has a Human Heart*" was presented later that spring (2015).

Lise Bjørne Linnert is a visual artist and she is the creator of this artwork. The installation required more space than was available at our 1st. floor area in the Library, so it was put up in the lobby at the ground floor.

The project (installation) is based on workshops where young, elderly; women and men – have written and embroidered quotes on colored canvas pieces. The quotes are reflections on evil, expressed by known and unknown, statesmen; freedom fighters, killers and criminals and ordinary people.

The artist invited Professor Anne Birgitta Nilsen to a discussion on language and hate speech, - and there were both staff and students participating. (Anne Birgitta Nilsen was attending the Library Lunch Event "Hate Speech" in March 2015).

The art installation was first presented in the constitution exhibition "*1814 Revisited - The Past is Still Present*" in 2014. It has since been on tour to various public spaces such as prisons, church rooms, schools and libraries. At each place, there has been an invitation to discussions as a part of the exhibition.

This three-part event (Lunch Event – exhibition - discussion) illustrates how useful a cooperation between our Library Lunch Events and our Exhibitions may be and how we can develop and create events like this for the future.

1. Library Lunch Event presents an OsloMet faculty member and her project/book ("*Hate Speech*")
2. The exhibition presents a visualization on the topic "hate speech" and may provide another and slightly different insight to the public who are offered an opportunity to engage with the same issue over time.
3. Finally, the discussion contributed to connect the Library Lunch Event and Exhibitions. The discussion focused on different perspectives and encouraged the public - employees and students - to participate.

Use of facilities: The use of the lobby (ground floor) made the installation more visible, because there is more space, and more people walking through the area!

Challenges

Now we have presented some of our events and exhibitions. We still have some challenges in our work of collaboration:

- The themes for our events can be controversial and may offend people - but it is important to encourage public debate, in order to comply with our public mission.
- Working hours: The organization of larger events and exhibitions may require more working time for the staff
- Space: We have a limited access to space facilities for events in the Library, at our 1st. floor.
- Limited financial resources and marketing resources may require that we continue to extend our cooperation with other actors at OsloMet.
- Competition (internal and external) can be a challenge: There are lots of events both on campus at OsloMet and in the City of Oslo. But we also see a great potential in adjusting to and collaborating with organizers of other events.
- Relevant to this, we should also make it a priority to follow up academic prizes and awards, e.g. Lecturer of the year at OsloMet, and new research projects.

Conclusion

In this paper we have presented some perspectives on how we have interpreted the public mission for our academic library, when it comes to events of culture, art and debate – and discussions. We have presented some examples on our events and exhibitions. In particular the *exhibition “Hurray to the Freedom of Speech”*, the event of *“Hate Speech”*/Art-installation *“Cruelty has a human heart”* illustrates how useful a cooperation between our Library Lunch Events and our Exhibitions may be. Despite the challenges, we can see a good potential for further developing our events, according to the public mission.

A New University Library action plan may provide an opportunity for articulating explicit principles for the public mission of our library.

When it comes to space and library facilities, there are possible plans for rebuilding the ground floor (lobby) in P48. Including the library in the ground floor area in P48 in a better way, by a rebuilding, may be a valuable extension of our library facilities. This may result in a more active zone for students and the space for events may be better.

With the words from E. Andrews, who have written an article on academic libraries and events, we conclude our paper: «Get the faculty excited, and they will pass that excitement along to their students – or at least require them to attend!» [Andrews, 2014, p. 154].

Different activities and experiences in the Library may foster community and identity across campus, and may contribute to make the University Library an inspiring place to be.

References

Anderson, A., Fagerlid, C., Larsen, H. & Straume, I. (2017). Åpne forskningsbibliotek. Innledende betraktninger. I: Anderson, A., Fagerlid, C., Larsen, H. & Straume (Red.) *Det åpne forskningsbibliotek: forskningsbibliotek i endring* (pp. 11-21). Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk.

Andrews, Elizabeth (2014). Ignore Them and They Will Come: Attracting Students to Academic Library Events. *Public Services Quarterly*, 10(2), pp.150-156.

Folkebibliotekloven. (n.d.). *Lov om folkebibliotek*. Retrieved from <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/1985-12-20-108?q=bibliotekloven>

Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus (n.d.). Learning Centre and Library. Retrieved from <http://www.hioa.no/eng/Learning-Centre-and-Library>

Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus (2012, September 28). Strategi 2020. Retrieved from <http://www.hioa.no/Om-HiOA/Virksomhetsstyring/Interne-styringsdokumenter/Strategi-2020>

Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus (2017, November 2017). Facts about HiOA. Retrieved from <http://www.hioa.no/eng/About-HiOA/Facts-about-HiOA>

Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus. (2018, May 29). Strategi 2024. Retrieved from <http://www.hioa.no/Om-HiOA/Virksomhetsstyring/Strategier>

Letnes, O., & Myhre, A. S. (2015). En god plan for statens satsing på folkebibliotek! *Bok og Bibliotek*, 82 (5), pp. 26-28.

Statistisk Sentralbyrå/Statistics Norway (2018, March 23). Her er de største studiestedene I Norge. Retrieved from <https://www.ssb.no/utdanning/artikler-og-publikasjoner/her-er-de-storste-studiestedene-i-norge>

Universitets- og høyskoleloven. (n.d.). *Lov om universiteter og høyskoler*. Retrieved from <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2005-04-01-15>

UiO.(2013, August 23). Faculty of Educational Sciences. Bildung/Education. Retrieved from <https://www.uv.uio.no/english/research/subjects/bildung/>